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## **News Release**

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### **2 east metro women plead guilty to smuggling wildlife**

Two women from the eastern Twin Cities metropolitan area recently pleaded guilty in federal court to smuggling protected wildlife into the United States for financial gain.

Pa Lor, unknown age, Oakdale, and Tia Yang, 36, Lake Elmo, each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to smuggle wildlife in Minneapolis before U.S. District Court Judge Joan Ericksen. Yang entered her plea yesterday, and Lor entered her plea today. Both Lor and Yang were indicted May 12.

According to their respective plea agreements, Yang leased a booth at the International Market Place, located in St. Paul. The booth was managed by Lor, and both defendants had an agreement to smuggle wildlife into the U.S. from Laos in order to sell the items at the booth starting as early as October 2005 and continuing through at least August 2006.

The pieces of wildlife included Asian elephant, giant squirrel, leopard cat, mongoose, black-striped weasel, gibbon, leaf monkey, monitor lizard, tapir, slider turtles, and small-clawed otter and the elegant flying squirrel.

Lor was stopped by law enforcement on Oct. 23, 2005, at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and found pieces of wildlife found in her possession.

The U.S. is a signatory to an international treaty aimed at protecting certain species of fish and wildlife against over-exploitation. According to the treaty, some of those protected species may be imported into the U.S., if prior to the importation, the importers obtain and possess a valid U.S. import permit and a valid export permit from the country in which the animal originated. The defendants did not have a permit.

Yang admitted that she knew Lor was smuggling wildlife and provided financial support to further the smuggling, and allowed packages of wildlife to be shipped to her from Laos for sale at the marketplace booth.

Both Lor and Yang face potential maximum penalties of five years in prison. Judge

Ericksen will determine their sentences on future dates.

This case is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of the Interior-Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney LeeAnn K. Bell.